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AUTHOR Hansen, Halvor P.
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INSTITUTION University of the Pacific, Stockton, Calif.
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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the main reason for the failure of many children to learn to read may be that reading programs often require the child to begin reading before he has developed oral language skills. By 3 years of age the child has acquired almost all the linguistic rules needed to produce basic, or kernel, sentences, which consist of subject, auxiliary, and predicate. Language programs for young children should work with the two major aspects of linguistic activity: competence (internalized knowledge, or rules of grammar), and performance (the use the child makes of that knowledge when speaking.) Transformational grammar may be used as a tool to expand the child's language; this is discussed in terms of Jacobs' (1968) writing on deep structure and surface structure. A first principle of language teachers is to listen to and respect the language the deprived child brings with him to the classroom, then extend his ability to communicate by addition of a new social dialect. Teachers must know how to assess the child's linguistic skills, identifying areas of competence and performance, so that individualized instruction may be planned. Classes should stress student involvement and utilization of the child's own sentence patterns, as a means for the teacher to direct the child's own discovery of transformations of more complex speech patterns. (Author/NH)

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LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS OF DEPRIVED CHILDREN

"Speak, so that through the words you speak, you may come into the light, that I may see you." -- Max Picard

by Halvor P. Hansen, Ph.D.
University of the Pacific

"Language--human speech--is an inexaustible abundance of manifold treasures. Language is inseparable from man and follows him in all his works. Language is the instrument with which man forms thought and feelings, mood, aspiration, will and act, the instrument by whose means he influences and is influenced, the ultimate and deepest foundations of human society." (Whitefield, 1963).

A major contemporary development in early childhood curricula and teaching strategies is the widespread reawakening of interest in the acquisition and development of oral language in children. It has become more and more clear that academic and social skills should be founded on a strong oral communication curriculum of the preschool. A child must listen and speak well before one can expect him to read and write with a high measure of success. The recent logitudinal research of Loban, a professor of education, has shown that children who could read and write well by the end of the third grade were those who ranked high in oral language in kindergarten and in the first three years of school (Loban, 1963). Loban concluded that mastery in the spoken language is basic to achieving desirable success in reading and writing.

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There is no area more basic and important to all learning than effective use and comprehension of oral language, yet it is neglected and it is porrly understood. The term "language arts" refers to a quarternary discipline, but too often in actual

classroom practice the language arts are reduced to a binary discipline of reading and writing. Many preschool programs for culturally disadvantaged children stress social-emotional experiences rather than language (Brottman, 1968). "...teachers know almost nothing about the language background of disadvantaged pupils and the communities where they live. For example, teachers work under the assumption that there is a single way of speaking and that everyone who does not speak in this grammar-book fashion is in error." (Brottman, 1968).

What is language? How does it function? How is it learned? Just how important is language? "It is commonly accepted that language is the instrument that, better than any other, enables persons both to develop and to participate in their culture." (Stauffer, 1965). It has been said that language is the key to unlock the child's ability to learn. Since language is the major medium of instruction, verbal differences may create a serious barrier to all forms of educational achievement.

A minor revolution is taking place in the fast-expanding field of early childhood education language arts instruction. Scientific research and recent developments in language arts curricula indicate significant changes of teaching the sequential language skills of listening and speaking, the basic modes of language, reading and writing, the supplementary skills. Educators admit that existing educational classroom strategies, coupled with a shortage of experienced teachers, are not providing the best solution to assist all children to achieve desirable success in reading. It is a well known fact that twenty-five per cent of all school children and up to one-half of the children in large city school systems encounter difficulty in learning to read. Unfortunately, many reading programs require the child to begin reading before he has developed oral language skills. Could this be the main reason why one million youngsters drop out of school each year?

The renewed interest and research in language has been fostered in part by new developments in the field of linguists. What is linguistics? Linguistics has been defined as the scientific study of language. (Dinneen, 1967). The term "language" has been used in veried contexts. Language has been described as an enormously significant iceberg, mainly below the surface and the "internal order" is not available for immediate observation. Language is systematic (system of principles and patterns); arbitrary (human convention); symbolic (vocal symbols); complete (capable of expressing every idea and feeling); and meaningful (language-fact relationship).

Anthropologists view language to be an expression of culture and often social attitudes. Language itself is a way of acting. Modern American linguists say that language is a well-organized, highly structured, and highly developed system of arbitrary vocal symbols that consists of an infinite set of spoken sentences (there are at least 10-20 sentences , 20 words long) formulated according to a finite set of internalized, linguistic system of rules (instead of language habits), from which sound, grammar, and meaning is derived for the purposes of communication. More specifically, it is postulated that children have an innate or "preprogrammed" ability to create language. That is to say that children are born with a biological predisposition (specific innate capacity) to acquire language in addtion to sociocultural influences.

It is suggested by Bolinger that there are three ingredients in the achievement of language: 1) an instinct in the shape of mental and physical capacities developed through countless centuries of natural selection; 2) a pre-existing language system, any one of the many produced by the cultures of the world; and 3) a competence

that comes from applying the instinct to the system through the relatively long period during which the child learns both to manipulate the physical elements of the system, such as sounds and words and syntactic rules, and to permeate them with meaning. (Bolinger, 1968). From the investigations presented by the rationalist point of view, language is innately specified almost in its entirety. Considered innate in language behavior are the "capacity for language as well as most of the structures of language" (Langacker, 1968). Some linguists would go so far as to say that there are innate hierarchical stages of linguistic acquisition. A child or any other speaker-hearer of a language uses re-invented, rule-governed behavior (innate linguistic organization) not only to formulate admissible combinations of sentences, but also to understand (interpret) sentences which other speaker-hearers of the same language create. This linguistic phenomena suggests that all language users of a given language, though they represent varied cultural environments, infer and apply similar rules of syntax to express thought, ideas, and emotions. It can be shown that all languages use noun phrases and verb phrases as well as sounds, words, and sentences. These underlying linguistic structures enable a great majority of the children to acquire and develop language in different cultural environments.

Linguistic acquisition occurs in a surprisingly short time, and at a given age, the majority of children have progressed somewhat uniformly in "learning their language." The first environmental contact a child has with language is through listening, and it remains amajor factor all of his life. Most children

begin to talk at approximately eight to twenty-four months. It is noted that Albert Einstein did not begin talking until the age of three. Learning the sound patterns of English begins around the tenth or twelfth months. Children between the ages of twelve months and eighteen to twenty-four onths produce one and two-word remarks that are called "holo-phrases" by linguists. Most often these are concrete nouns (doggie, car), but action verbs and 'modifiers' (good-boy) also appear. Using the variety of admissible word combinations (grammar) begins around or before the second birthday. The rate of acquisition and development of the phonotactical sound patterns and grammar (syntactical development) changes radically during the next two years, and then there is a gradual slowing down. After age twelve to thirteen language acquistion seems to stop. Since the least severe constraints (memory being the main one) on the child's capacity to follow his own rules are operating between the ages of two and four, this age is known as the "sensitivity" period when all systems are go.

Sometime between eighteen and twenty-four months, most children begin to form basic two-and three-word constructions (hear car; what's that; see truck Mommy; all gone shoe). It has been said that by the third year of life a child has acquired and uses almost all the linguistic rules needed to produce the so-called basic or kernel sentences (i. e. sentences produced by phrase-structure rules). For example, a kernel sentence is a sentence (S) which is resolved into its immediate constitutents; a subject, which is a noun phrase (NP), and auxillary (AUX), and a predicate, which is a verb phrase (VP), or more succinctly: S → NP + AUX + VP. These in turn are resolved into their immed-

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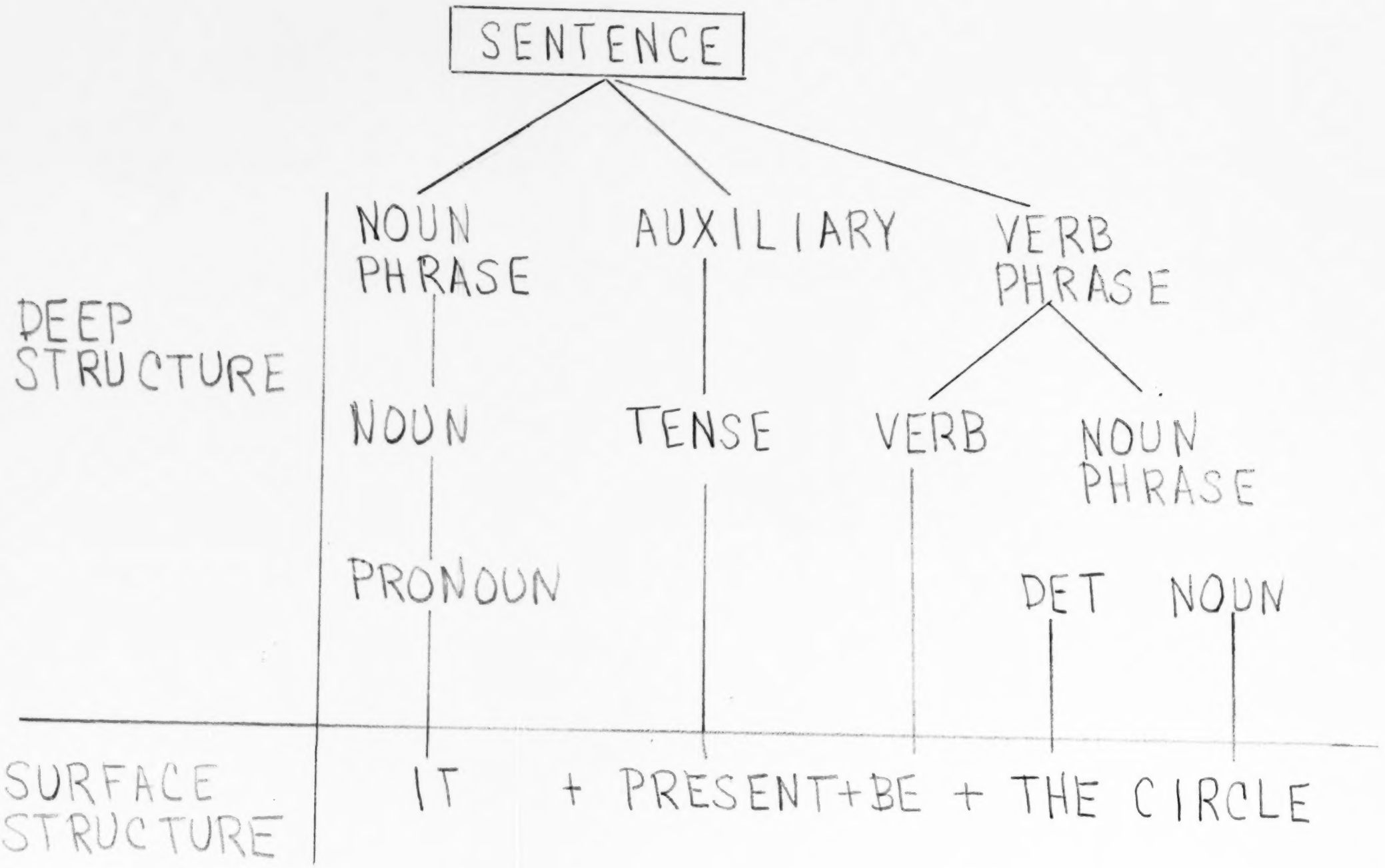


Figure 1. Representations of deep and surface syntactic structure.

iate constitutents, and so on--gradually generating a hierarchy--an organized "Tree," in which lower-order constitutents branch downward from higher-order constitutents. See Figure 1. The girl is eating pie. Teague swims well. She gave a toy to the baby. These are examples of kernel sentences; sentences with no complex noun or verb phrases. All the essential grammatical structures (phrase-structure levels) used by adults to generate sentences can be found in the grammar of nursery school children, if not before (Menyuk, 1969). As age advances, structures are added to structures, as befits the research of mean sentence length as an indicator of language maturity, but there is no difference in the basic grammatical structures used. Those grammatically acceptable structures used at an early age continue to be used as the child matures. In addition to the grammatical structures, children use intonations that help with the meaning of their language forms.

An average child is well on the way to mastering the essential symbols (vocal sounds) and the complex and abstract system (grammar) by the time he is five. When the child enters first grade, he already knows the language of his home, his neighborhood, and his community to some extent. And, he has an extensive vocabulary. He is generating his sentences effortlessly and spontaneously through unconscious use of grammatical "rules" induced from his language as he has acquired and developed it, but he does not have skillful control of his language and there are obvious differencies in each child's speaking skills.

It is important to note that disadvantaged children, because of their limited

and limiting language development of their early home and neighborhood environments, need speical help in discovering the possibilities for a more universal speech form by understanding and practicing in the early years other dialects (or at least one) of language concurrently with his own idiolect. School and society presently require the child to know how to switch from the "home" dialect to the "school" dialect--School English. This will lead to an awareness of how other speakers communicate and will prevent his spoken code from becoming self-enforcing and self-perpetuating.

This new point of view about language is a major recent development in grammatical theory. Recent research evidence indicated that such a conception of the genesis of language comes from an analysis of two major aspects of linguistic activity: a) linguistic competence and b) linguistic performance. An effective explication of linguistic competence and performance has been by Chomsky, a professor of modern languages and linguistics (Chomsky, 1965). The term competence refers to the "hypothesized" underlying rules that have been mastered by the speaker-hearer." Performance, on the other hand, is "how" a speaker produces the sentences of his language. This "how" operates under constraints of memory, attention, motivation, distraction errors, the external speech environment, as well as physiological and acoustic paramenters. Lenneburg, a social psychologist, defines competence as that ability of the native speaker (speaker-hearer) to associate sounds and meanings in accordance with the rules of his language (Lenneburg, 1967). That is, he has internalized the rules that determine the sound shapes of the sentence and what it means. Performance is the actual observed use of

the language. To put it another way, the system (grammar) of language is the internalized knowledge a speaker uses in producing and understanding any of the infinite number of grammatical sentences of his language. This knowledge (or rules of grammar) that a language user knows about his language is the same for understanding and speaking. This would be termed linguistic competence for a speaker of whatever ethnic group. The child's participation in the many linguistic activities discovered in his social environment will be guided by this frame of reference, his linguistic competence. See Figure 2. Linguistic performance is the actual use the speaker makes of that knowledge or competence in a particular speaking situation. If this theory of language acquisition and development reflects actual human learning patterns, as recent research indicates that is does, then certainly any language program for young children should consider and work with these two major aspects of linguistic activity: linguistic competence and performance.

An appropriate scientific tool with which to approach the universe of linguistic competence and performance appears to be transformational grammar. This approach to grammar permits one to infer the deep structure of sentences, and outline hypothetically the process by means of which the speaker brings the deep structures of language to the tangible surface of the utterance.

Sentences of the world's languages have both a deep structure, which gives the meaning of the sentences, and a surface structure, which gives the form of the sentence as it is used in communication (Jacobs, 1968). "The

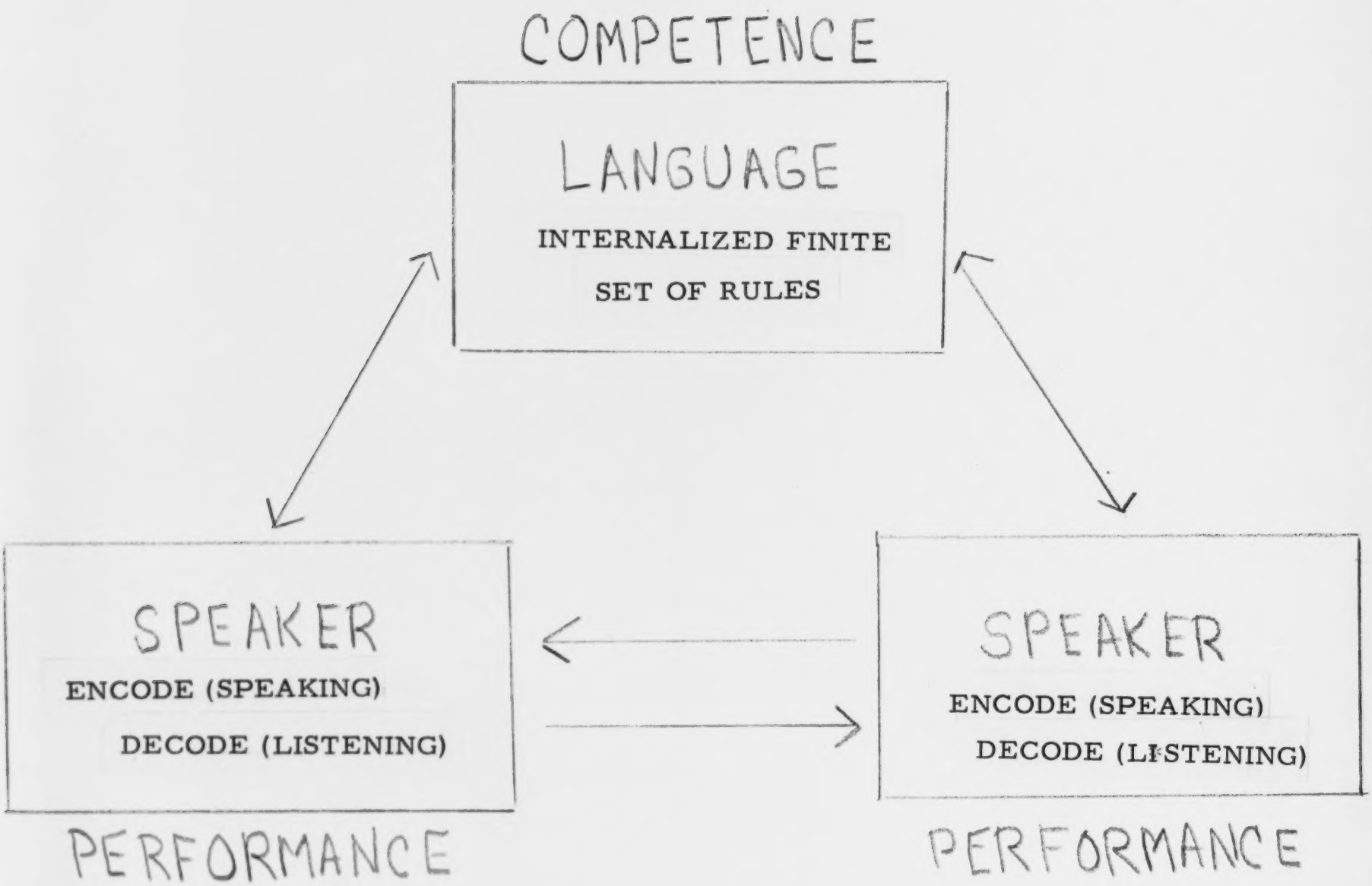


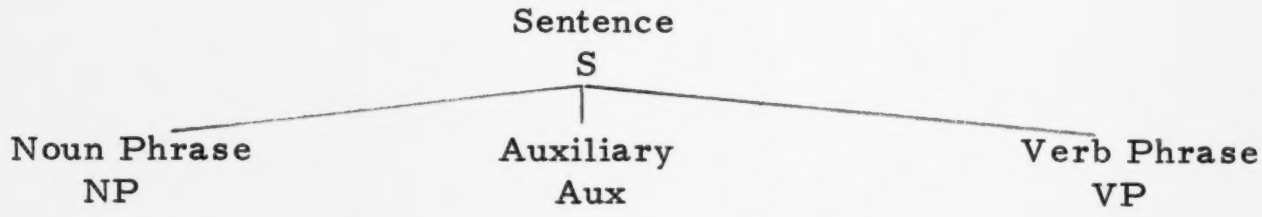
Figure 2. CYCLE OF SPEECH

meaning of a sentence is conveyed by its Deep Structure; the form of a sentence is given by its Surface Structure." Perhaps this statement by Jacobs is the most important fact about the sentences of human language. He considers it so--"the most important fact about the sentences of human languages is that all sentences have both a deep structure and a surface structure."

How is the deep structure of a sentence related to its surface structure? A deep structure becomes a surface structure via transformations. When the thought conceived in the deep structure is pronounced in a sentence it becomes surface structure.

Jacobs states that a deep structure is an abstract object; it is a structure one assumes on the basis of the meaning of a sentence and its syntax. A surface structure is closer to physical reality in that it concretely specifies the syntactic structure necessary for spoken or written communication. Transformations relate deep structures and surface structures, or, more specifically, they transform one constituent structure into another. If more than one transformation is necessary, intermediate structures will be generated by each transformation until the surface structure is formed (Jacobs, 1968).

Jacobs further postulates that the noun phrase, auxilary, and verb phrase are the three basic constituents of every sentence. Formulated into a rule, this could become a model for the unconscious psychological rule followed by every human being speaking a human language. This rule could be represented in a tree diagram (derivational tree):



A rule representing this tree diagram would state the following:

> A sentence consists of a noun phrase followed by an auxiliary and a verb phrase.

The phrase structure rule could be abbreviated as:

S-----NP / Aux / VP

Transformational grammar can be defined as a finite set of rules that enumerates or generates an infinite number of grammatical sentences of a language and no ungrammatical ones and assigns to each sentence generated its proper structural description. Transformational grammar consists of two components:

1. The syntactic component consisting of:
   a. Phrase structure level
   b. Transformational structure level
2. The phonological component consisting of a number of parts, or levels, for representing the structure of sentences.

It is the transformational level that distinguishes this grammar from any other type of generative grammar.

Rules for the production of the sentence, "It is a circle," would be:

Sentence----------Noun Phrase ∤ Auxiliary ∤ Verb Phrase
Noun Phrase-------- Pronoun
Pronoun---------- It ("It" replacement for "A circle.")
Auxiliary----------Tense
Tense---------- present
Verb Phrase-------- be ∤ Noun Phrase
Verb---------- be
Noun Phrase-------- Determiner ∤ Noun
Determiner--------- a
Noun---------- Count (singular)
Noun----------circle

Then, rewritten using symbols the rules would be:

Phrase Rules

for: It is the circle.

1. S-----NP ∤ Aux ∤ VP
2. NP--- Pro
3. Pro-- "It" replacement for "the circle"
4. Aux-- Tense
5. T---- pres
6. VP---V ∤ NP
7. V---- be
8. NP--- Det ∤ N
9. Det--- the
10. N----- Cnt ∤ sg
11. N-----circle

The application of these rules produce the following string:

it ∤ pres ∤ be ∤ the ∤ circle

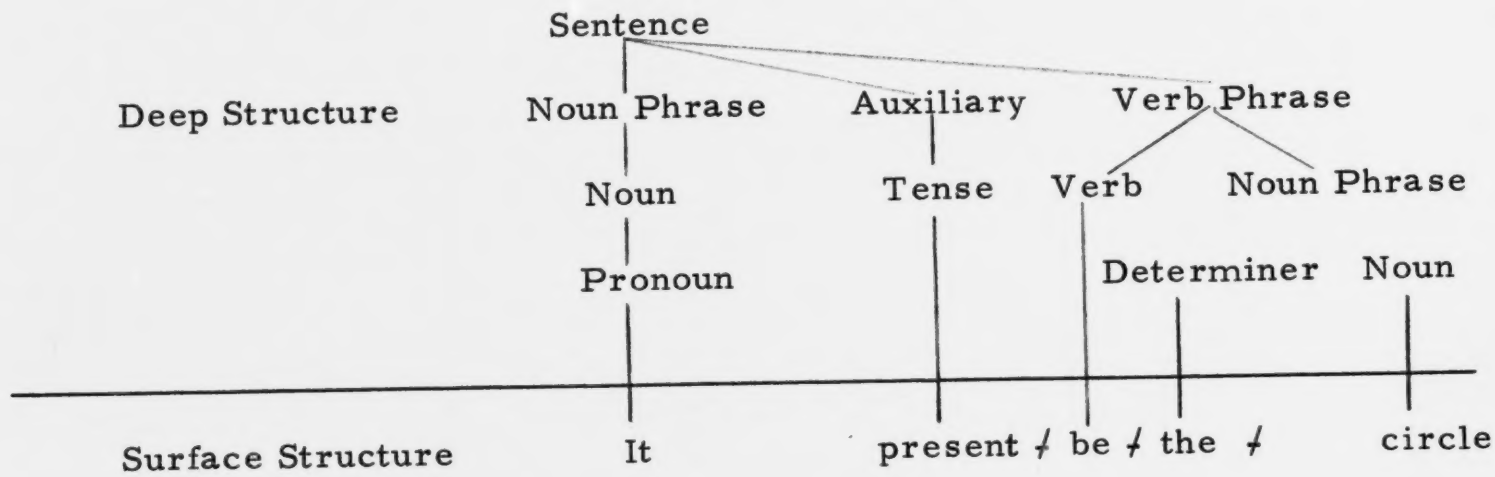
Phonological Rules

1. V ∤ pres-----be ∤ pres-----is

When the phonological rules are applied to the above string, the following sentence is obtained:

It is the circle.

The sentence produced by the ordered application of the rules can be represented by the following diagram. The upper components, which are the components of an infinite number of sentences, represent the deep structure of the sentence. The lower components are actual words and represent the surface structure of the same sentence.



The application of the phrase rules produce the following string:

it / present / be / the / circle / sg

Sentence: It is the circle.

KEY for Symbols

S--------Sentence
---------Rewritten as
NP------ Noun Phrase
V------- Verb
VP------ Verb Phrase
Aux----- Auxiliary
PP------ Prepositional Phrase
Det------Determiner
Vi------- Verb Intransitive
Vt------- Verb Transitive

T--------Tense
M--------Modal
Prep-----Preposition
Pl------- Plural
Sg------- Singular
Pas------Past
Pres-----Present
Part----- Participle
----- Incorporation of phrase into sentence

The transformational grammar process also permits the observation of arbitrary rules as well as environmental influences which generate the varied social dialects. The ideal structural pattern previously identi-

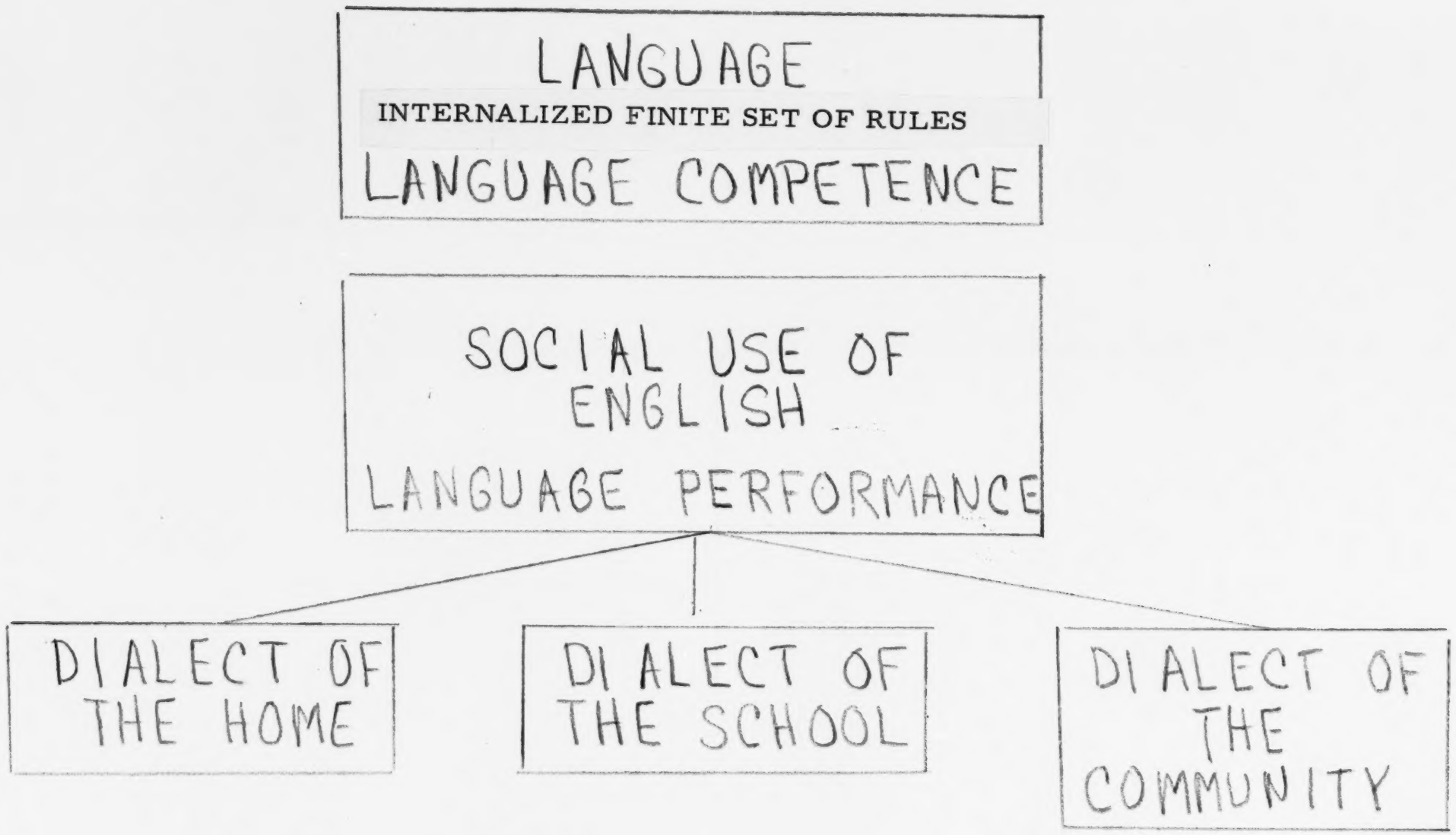


Figure 3. LANGUAGE UNIVERSALS AND DIALECTS

Labov found that representatives of every social dialect speak in different styles in different situations (Labov, 1966). It is pointed out by Bolinger that every speaker speaks as many dialects as there are groups among which he moves that have different models of speech (Bolinger, 1966). He lists the important determinants as to the dialect used as: profession; sex, age; and occasion. Shy suggests that in most cases it will be best not to destroy social class dialect, for its user may need it to survive in certain social situations (Shy, 1968). Instead it may be best to add to it a new social dialect which will extend his possibility to communicate. Frequently, in the school environment, the language different child feels that his language, the only one he knows well, is something of which to be ashamed. His self-esteen of being a worthwhile individual is threatened by non-acceptance of his language system, causing guilt-shame feelings of inadequacy. These difficulties can be alleviated by showing respect and acceptance of his language and culture. Therefore, it should be the purpose of education not to eliminate the child's dialectical patterns, but to add to his linguistic repertoire.

For early childhood teachers, sound pedagogy demands the teachers' skills in the assessment of pupil behavior. For example, linguistic assessment procedures are critical to the task of reporting individual pupil progress and determining the wor th of instructional techniques and materials. Equally important, however, is linguistic assessment designed to identify areas of language competence and language performance among children so that individualized instruction may be planned and executed.

tified as the basis of language competence is not used homogeneously, but manifested in the most heterogenous ways conditioned by social environment. Language usuage varies with age, socio-economic group and geographical region of the speaker. This is his dialect. There are three main manifestations of English according to the social distribution of its structural pattern, namely: the "home" dialect, the dialect unconsciously used by family members of pronouncing and phrasing in a distinctive way certain words that have special meanings within the living group; the "school" dialect, the dialect used in the text books and expected of the students by teachers in the classroom; and the "community" dialect, the dialect used to carry on the important affairs of the community.

Linguistically speaking, users of different dialects are equally competent to use the structural pattern of language they have in common, but as stated earlier, social distribution and level of education may convert the common pattern of language into any of the English dialects. In a given home dialect, for example, the obligatory morphological rules may not be present (she work here; 75 cent) or be manifested in a manner different from that dictated by the "main-stream" dialect (We runned all the way home); or may show phonetic shapes different from those used in a given school dialect (childerun-children; foots-feet). The relation of linguistic competence and linguistic performance to universal language and the dialects of society are depicted in Figure 3.

Without relevant assessments of a child's verbal behavior when he enters preschool and kindergarten and prepares to encounter successively new units of classroom activity, the readiness training principle reduces to a sterile cliche.

Children from the "culture of poverty" have learned language; the dialect of the home (but not the dialect of the T. V.--he views T. V. 1000 hours each year) which may be <u>different</u> from "formal" English, not necessarily pathological, underdeveloped, insufficient, deficient, inexact, inconsistent, nor restricted. He needs not to be remediated but rather he needs to be <u>listened to, accepted</u> and <u>understood</u>. Teachers should listen and accept, rather than correct. Expose--do not impose. Letting the children speak without correction (occasionally re-stating in "formal" speech) is better than taking the chance of stifling the child's speech altogether. Language educators must have a basic knowledge of dialect differences which the child brings to the classroom. It should be mandatory that those who work with differently advantaged children be required to have an understanding of the major aspects of linguistic activity: linguistic competence and linguistic performance. This will alert the teachers to the pervasive nature of language differences, and will provide them with a minimum linguistic background.

Opportunities for verbal behavior should be designed both to match the child's linguistic and conceptual strategies, and to anticipate and prepare for those which the child shall encounter. Effective learning is

based on that which resembles the language he knows and uses and builds on. The first principle of any language program is that, whatever the target, it must respect the language that the child brings with him to the classroom (Bolinger, 1968). When the child experiences new information which he finds neither too familiar nor too strange, a good "match" is achieved (Hunt, 1964). Try to match the language strategies with the intellectual strides of the learner. The teacher must tailor the day to day activities to elicit the competence which the child brings with him to the classroom. These activities should emphasize student-involvement (instead of teacher-dominated) presentations based on inquiry, narrations, interpretations, conversations, etc. with the teacher observing the child's linguistic performance becoming paramount. Linguistic performance should be analyzed in terms of rules of transformational grammar. The analysis of children's utterances i. e. word-parts (affixes, inflections, contractions, and compounds); word order; and sentence construction is essential to the teacher to determine the grammar he should use in preparing teaching materials. The lessons should be engineered around word and sentence constructions of the children in order to help them anticipate the meaning in the developmental instructional readiness material. Seeing the world through the eyes of a child means talking and reading about the world through the words of a child.

Utilizing the child's own sentence patterns effectively prepares him for reading. It is time now to start with the progressive addition of basic linguistic patterns (phrase-structure rules) and development of teaching

strategies in order to let the child understand how much he can do with the spoken form of language. The child will soon discover that the command of his native tongue makes out of him an important person.

As the child has acquired self confidence in performing linguistically, he moves from his own basic sentence patterns to more complete and meaningful oral expression. New rules of transformations should be progressively tried out. At this stage of language development, the child is ready to move forward and to discover many ways to transform his basic sentences (adding, substituting, and deleting words and phrases and even sentences), and to experience the satisfaction of making his language express his true feelings. This is the period of the child's greatest language development. Successful elementary transformational try-outs should be included in new teaching materials as well as in every day classroom activities. Such teaching strategies will expand the range of grammatical structures the child controls, add to his vocabulary, and give him a strongand necessary foundation to learn the supplementary skills of reading, writing, and spelling. Sentence speaking is a pre-requisite for sentence reading.

Teachers need to do more than provide a good speech model. A child does more than echo what he hears. One view is that on the basis of their capacity for language, children are able to formulate hypotheses about grammatical regularities observed in the speech of parents and teachers. Each hypothesis is evaluated against further evidence, such as distinguishing grammatical sentences from ungrammatical ones; perceiving ambiguity in grammatical sentences; and perceiving synonymous sentences. Moreover,

each hypothesis is evaluated against the teacher's reaction to a child's speech. The children even perform linguistic experiments, the equivalent in many respects of the experiments conducted in scientific laboratories. This linguistic experience is called "optimizing"--that is, the child has fitted a newly acquired expression into the mold of an old one that resembles it and it is familiar and easy (Bolinger, 1968). The basic notion of the "match" supports this postulate. Very often parents imitate and extend the language patterns of children, and in doing so, enlarge a child's sentence into a well-formed English sentence. Brown finds that parents expand approximately thirty per cent of what two-year children say (Brown, 1966).

The function of linguistic experience according to one point of view, is not so much as to shape language as to activate the linguistic competence with which we are born. There is not a shred of evidence supporting a view that progress toward adult norms of grammar arises merely from practice in overt imitation of adult sentences. The teacher should direct the child's discovery of the transformations of complex English patterns.

The teacher needs to listen to children more; especially he needs to listen to children's questions. The child's home language is different in many instances from that which he encounters suddenly at school. He is not familiar with the question-answer format. He must be taught what "Ask me a question," (Inquiry-mode) means.

A child acquires and develops language by discovering it and by using it. Linguistic performance is enhances by identifying specific linguistic

episodes that challenge the child's optimal linguistic competence. This discovery will increase the child's communication skills in hearing-saying and reading-writing sounds, words, phrases, and sentences of English.

Halvor P. Hansen, Ph. D.
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California
November 13, 1969

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